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SUBJECT: CHINA-AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Aubrey Carlson,
reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) Afghan Embassy First Secretary Meerwais Nab told PolOffs January 14 that China and Afghanistan have good bilateral relations, but he noted Chinese concerns, including the presence of U.S. forces near the Sino-Afghan border, India's influence in Afghanistan, "elements" in Afghanistan assisting ETIM and other groups operating in lawless areas, and the lack of a common Afghanistan strategy among coalition partners. PRC MFA officials probed visiting Canadian officials about possible changes in U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in the new administration, the prospects and approaches for reconciliation and whether Saudi Arabia has a role to play in Afghanistan. The Canadian officials reported that MFA officials told them China has no plans to send security or protective details to Afghanistan. END SUMMARY.

Lunch with the Allies

2. (C) On January 14, PolOffs attended a Canadian Embassy-hosted lunch on Afghanistan in connection with the January 12-15 visit to Beijing of Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Afghanistan Task Force Policy and Advocacy Division Regional Policy Advisor James Gilmour and Deputy Division Director Christopher Gibbins. The objective of the Canadian delegation's visit was to exchange views with the MFA on Afghanistan and Pakistan and urge greater Chinese involvement in Afghanistan's reconstruction and in regional efforts to promote peace and stability. Representatives from the Afghan, Australian, Dutch, French, German, Italian and Turkish Embassies attended.

3. (C) Noting that the MFA presented a "bleak but thin" overview of the situation in Afghanistan, the Canadian Task Force members said they emphasized to the Chinese the terrorist links between Al-Qaeda, Pakistan and Afghanistan and pushed the Chinese to take a greater role in Afghanistan, including addressing the counter-terrorism situation in the region and helping Afghanistan "develop a political culture." The Canadians said the Chinese showed interest in developments surrounding the Afghan elections.

China Echoes Pakistani Concerns on Afghanistan

4. (C) Chinese officials reiterated Pakistan's concerns on Afghanistan to the Canadians, including suspicions about Indian intentions in Afghanistan and concerns about inadequate Pashtun representation in Afghan governance institutions. In particular, Pakistan is concerned that, through India's consulates in Afghanistan's south and

southeast, India is possibly trying to destabilize Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Afghan diplomat Nab commented that because of close Sino-Pakistani ties, China has been sensitive to India's influence in Afghanistan.

Chinese Interests and Concerns in Afghanistan

15. (C) The Canadians reported that PRC MFA officials probed them regarding possible changes in U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in the new administration. In addition, the Chinese asked about the prospects for and possible approaches to reconciliation with the Taliban, and whether Saudi Arabia has a role to play in Afghanistan.

16. (C) Afghan diplomat Nab said Chinese officials have expressed concern about the presence of U.S. forces near the Sino-Afghan border (China's "backyard") and in particular, near the sensitive area of China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Nab mentioned that there is currently an Afghan-China-NATO security mechanism based in Kabul with the aim of providing security to Chinese citizens working on construction projects in the country, but Sino-NATO engagement is generally low. Separately, the Canadians said Chinese MFA officials acknowledged ISAF's "positive" role in providing security in Afghanistan and that MFA officials told them China has no plans to send security or protective details for Chinese workers to Afghanistan.

No Common International Strategy, and ETIM Concerns

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17. (C) Nab stated that the PRC worries about a lack of a common strategy among coalition partners and ignorance of the situation on the ground and noted Chinese anxiety about "elements" in Afghanistan assisting ETIM (the East Turkestan Independence Movement, a terrorist organization active in Xinjiang) and other groups operating in "lawless areas."

Sino-Afghan Relations

18. (C) Nab provided an overview of Sino-Afghan relations, underscoring the steady development of the relationship over the past seven years. Noting "no major bilateral issues" between the two countries, Nab said Afghanistan desires closer engagement with China and believes that China has the capability to do much more, especially in the areas of capacity building and infrastructure. Nab said engagement with China should be in close coordination with other donor countries.

19. (C) Nab cited increased bilateral trade figures, with a total volume of 870 million U.S. dollars in 2008 (composed almost entirely of Chinese exports). China has pledged 150 million U.S. dollars in aid to Afghanistan, half of which will be provided through concessional loans.

NATO and SCO Engagement

110. (C) Discussing the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Chinese officials told the Canadians that they had hoped the SCO would have been more active in promoting stability in Afghanistan, but the organization has yet to take an active role. Afghan diplomat Nab noted SCO's difficulty in addressing counter-narcotics issues in Afghanistan strategically because narcotics production and trafficking do not fit neatly into one of the "Three Evils" of terrorism, extremism and separatism that the SCO has pledged to counter. He commented, too, that Afghan approaches to the SCO for possible security assistance have been fruitless.

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